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Job Instability and Family Trends: a Comparative Study

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DRAFT VERSION

1. Introduction

Over the past forty years the labour market has undergone deep-reaching changes. It no longer offers the guarantees ensured with the social contract ratified between State and citizens in the last century; job security has now become a decidedly dicey matter; jobs tend to be temporary and intermittent, while the condition of being a labour market insider has lost its old solidity. Job flexibility is now very much the rule, and job opportunities are largely with fixed-term contracts. While, on the one hand, there is now a choice between a wider range of types of contract, which can help in reconciling work and family, on the other hand, for the younger generations, hopes of setting up a family (and consequently reproducing), based essentially on economic stability, are all too often thwarted. Thus the spawning of atypical jobs brings social scientists up against their possible social-economic and demographic implications, particularly when the risk of the insecurity trap opens up in the name of flexibility.

It was on the basis of these considerations that in June 2005 the Fondazione G. Brodolini, together with the Department of Demographic Sciences of the Rome University "Sapienza" submitted to the European Commission (DGV Employment, Social affairs and Equal opportunities) the interdisciplinary research project *Job*

instability and family trends (JIFT)[1] financed as from December of the same year. The project partnership saw the collaboration, together with Italy, of Germany, Poland and Slovenia. The decision to include in the project two of the new EU25 member states was motivated by interest in examining the object of research in the context of "post-communist" welfare systems (Ule and Kuhar, 2003), having their own peculiar characteristics owing virtually nothing to the systems known and studied in Western Europe.

This article starts off from the JIFT project. Analysing a sample of young adults aged between 25 and 44 living in four urban environments (Hamburg, Ljubljana, Rome and Warsaw), we will illustrate the essential empirical evidence emerging in the relationship between job insecurity and family behaviour patterns, in the light of a series of social-economic and demographic factors and determinants[2]. In this analysis, where the data collected allow for it[3], we have also tried to take into account couple dynamics, which prove to be highly relevant to the reproductive strategies adopted. Finally, through the evidence of the statistical findings we extend our scope to some considerations on certain policy measures to be included in a "horizontal system of integrated policies" in which family policies are associated with policies regarding gender, investment in human capital, employment and protection and support for children (McDonald, 2006).

The article consists of five parts: in the first we describe the main trends characterising the transformations that have come about in the labour market and in the reproductive behaviour in Europe; the second includes a brief outline of the research project; in the third part we discuss some interesting empirical evidence emerging from the field survey carried out in the four cities listed above; in the last part we offer some policy indications that might help in the processes of transition to job security, while at the same time reinforcing economic stability for men and women and their propensity to have their first child.

2. The European context at a glance

Considering the relationship between employment and family behaviour, the profound changes that have come about in the labour market and the decline in fertility rates represent two challenges that many countries in Europe, but not only Europe, now find themselves up against. Research into their possible connections and the determinants behind their development processes calls for further study at the micro and macro level.

As far as family behaviour patterns are concerned, while low fertility levels and the postponement of union formation and childbearing represent a common issue to all the EU countries, the timing and intensity of these changes differ appreciably across countries. In fact, despite the generalized decline in total fertility rates (TFRs), countries in northern Europe and some in the continental area continue to show values close to the

[1] See Section 3.

[2] The paper includes some of the main findings of the JIFT project deriving from the contributions by Bernardi et al. (2007), Mamolo and Di Cesare (2007) and Naticchioni and Muzi (2007).

[3] The questionnaire used for field survey (with the CATI technique) included in some sections information not only on the interviewee but also his/her partner. This enabled us to take a couple approach, and not only a gender approach, to the interviewees' fertility intentions.

level of population replacement (France with 1.8, Sweden, Denmark and Finland with 1.7). Germany is an evident exception, showing a TFR much closer to that of the southern European countries. Others, like Slovenia and Poland, belonging to post-communist welfare systems, and Italy, belonging to the Mediterranean welfare family, fluctuate between 1.2 and 1.3 (Eurostat, 2006) – values well below what is termed the safety zone, at 1.5 (McDonald, 2006).

The reasons for these changes have been extensively studied in the literature, but we still have a long way to go to reach clear, exhaustive interpretation of the phenomenon given the number of factors involved and their diversity at the social-economic and cultural levels, and indeed the complexity of the links running between them.

Taking a microeconomic approach, the decline in fertility would appear to be attributable to the rising levels of education of the female population, and their growing involvement in the labour market. However, the facts are decidedly more complex. The literature indicates in the changes that have come about in the job commitments of men and women one of the major factors affecting couples' decisions on reproductive strategies and forms of families. The gradual transition from the classical *male breadwinner* model, rigidly assigning the task of production to men and that of reproduction and care to women, to the *dual earner* model, based on a fairer share in tasks and responsibilities between the partners both contributing to the family income and participating in the labour market, has brought the issue of work/family reconciliation to the forefront. This in particular where the woman works and essentially looks after the family herself. Thus, it is clear-cut the necessity of the diffusion of a *gender equal* model, based on a more equal division of tasks and responsibilities between partners, and the need for labour and family policies favouring greater and better child care and assistance services, longer, better paid periods of parental leave, more effective measures for job flexibility, etc.

Moreover, the difficulties and delays characterising the entry of above all the young into the labour market, the slow transition from atypical or non-standard forms of contracts to open-end contracts, job insecurity, persisting gender differences in opportunities for access to and conditions for continued presence in the labour market – all these factors apparently tend to have negative influence on the fertility choices of the younger generations in particular (Oppenheimer, 1988; Oppenheimer and Lew, 1995; McDonald, 2000). Hence analysis of certain indicators characterising labour market conditions in Europe may prove useful in assessing the possible interactions between job insecurity and family choices.

Table 1 brings out some interesting differences in labour market levels and trends among the EU-15 and EU-25 member countries. The former show a general increase in employment levels, while the latter show the contrary trend. Coming more specifically to the countries involved in the JIFT project, Italy and Slovenia show growing employment trends as from the end of the 1990s (from 51.3% in 1997 to 57.6% in 2005 for the former, and from 62.6% to 66.0% over the same period for the latter).

Tab. 1 – Employment rates, 1997-2005 (% population 15-64)

	1997			2000			2003			2005		
	MF	**M**	**F**	**MF**	**M**	**F**	**MF**	**M**	**F**	**MF**	**M**	**F**
EU-25	60.6	70.2	51.1	62.4	71.2	53.6	62.9	70.8	55.0	63.8	71.3	56.3

EU-15	60.7	70.6	50.8	63.4	72.8	54.1	64.3	72.7	56.0	65.1	72.9	57.4
New member countries	60.2	67.8	52.8	57.4	63.7	51.3	55.9	61.7	50.2	56.9	63.3	50.7
Germany	*63.7*	*71.9*	*55.3*	*65.6*	*72.9*	*58.1*	*65.0*	*70.9*	*58.9*	*65.4*	*71.2*	*59.6*
Italy	*51.3*	*66.5*	*36.4*	*53.7*	*68.0*	*39.6*	*56.1*	*69.6*	*42.7*	*57.6*	*69.9*	*45.3*
Poland	*58.9*	*66.8*	*51.3*	*55.0*	*61.2*	*48.9*	*51.2*	*56.5*	*46.0*	*52.8*	*58.9*	*46.8*
Slovenia	*62.6*	*67.0*	*58.0*	*62.8*	*67.2*	*58.4*	*62.6*	*67.4*	*57.6*	*66.0*	*70.4*	*61.3*

Source: Eurostat Online Database, May 2006.

A contrary trend is seen in Poland, where employment rates have gone through considerable decline with transition to a market economy. The fall also had notable effect on female labour market participation, dropping from 51.3% in 1997 to 46.8% in 2005. In Italy, too, female employment still stands around fairly low levels (45.3%), twenty-four percentage points below the level for males and still a long way from the Lisbon Objective (60% by 2010). In general, however, in terms of total employment all four countries have quite a long way to go to reach the Lisbon Objective (70%).

On the reverse side of the picture, the unemployment rates, with a fairly sharp drop in Italy (from 11.3% in 1997 to 7.7% in 2005), lower levels in Slovenia and Germany (+0.4 percentage points), show a decidedly rising trend only in Poland, which showed a peak of 17.7% in 2005 (tab. 2).

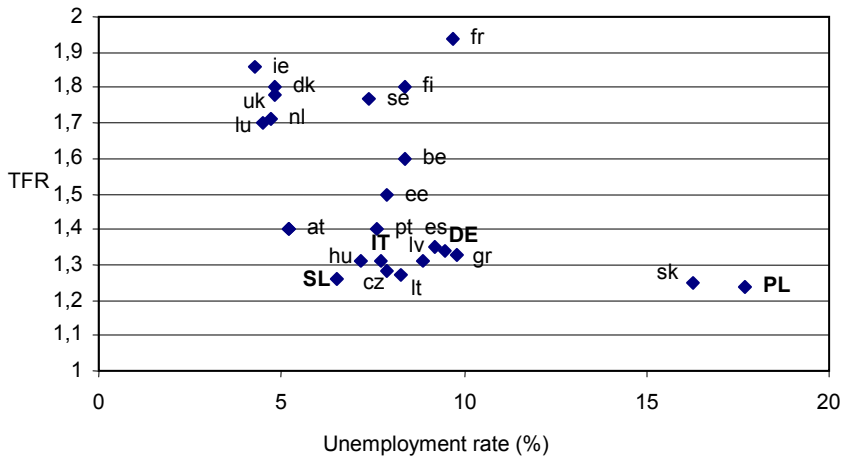
Study of the relationship between unemployment and fertility seems to suggest a negative correlation, higher levels in the unemployment rate discouraging the choice to have children given the difficulty of returning to the labour market after a period of maternity or on account of the uncertainty of job opportunities supplied by the market (fig. 1).

Tab. 2 – Unemployment rates, 1997-2005 (% labour force)

	1997			2000			2003			2005		
	MF	*M*	*F*	*MF*	*M*	*F*	*MF*	*M*	*F*	*MF*	*M*	*F*
EU-25	-	-		8.6	7.4	10.2	9.0	8.1	10.2	8.7	7.9	9.8
EU-15	9.9	8.4	11.8	7.7	6.4	9.3	8.0	7.0	9.3	7.9	7.0	8.9
New member countries	-	-		13.6	12.6	14.8	14.3	13.7	15.1	13.4	12.6	14.4
Germany	*9.1*	*7.3*	*11.6*	*7.2*	*6.0*	*8.7*	*9.0*	*8.2*	*10.1*	*9.5*	*8.9*	*10.3*
Italy	*11.3*	*8.7*	*15.3*	*10.1*	*7.8*	*13.6*	*8.4*	*6.5*	*11.3*	*7.7*	*6.2*	*10.1*
Poland	*10.9*	*9.1*	*13.0*	*16.1*	*14.4*	*18.1*	*19.6*	*19.0*	*20.4*	*17.7*	*16.5*	*19.2*
Slovenia	*6.9*	*6.8*	*7.1*	*6.7*	*6.5*	*7.1*	*6.7*	*6.3*	*7.1*	*6.3*	*5.9*	*6.9*

Source: Eurostat Online Database, May 2006.

Fig. 1 – Unemployment and fertility in the EU in 2005



Source: Eurostat Online Database, May 2006; Council of Europe (2005).

If the datum shows a certain consistency in relation to countries like Poland, where high employment rates are accompanied by low levels of fertility, the question remains as to why in countries like Slovenia, where unemployment rates are decidedly modest, even for the female component of the labour market, fertility rates continue to show very low levels. Much the same applies to the case of Italy, where, although female unemployment is still at 10% (the rate for males is 6%), the fertility level is anyway low . Clearly, the reasons for the direct correlation between low unemployment rates and continued decline in fertility in these countries are to be sought elsewhere: for example, in the characteristics of employment (from a structural point of view) and, indeed, in the system of policies in support of work/family reconciliation.

Let us now take a look at the data on non-standard forms of employment: part-time and temporary. Part-time employment shows interesting differences in the four countries involved in the JIFT project. More widespread in Germany and Italy (24.0% and 12.8% respectively) than in Poland and Slovenia (10.8% and 9%), rising appreciably in the first two countries, showing moderate growth Slovenia and practically stationary in Poland, it appears to follow different patterns according to the various environments (tab. 3).

Tab. 3 – The incidence of part-time workers, 1997-2005 (% of total employed aged 15-64)

	1997			2000			2003			2005		
	MF	**M**	**F**	**MF**	**M**	**F**	**MF**	**M**	**F**	**MF**	**M**	**F**
EU-25	16.0	5.9	29.8	16.2	6.1	29.5	17.0	6.6	30.3	20.4	7.5	36.5
EU-15	16.7	5.7	32.2	17.7	6.1	33.2	18.5	6.7	33.9	21.7	7.7	39.2
New member countries	9.6	7.5	12.2	8.1	5.9	10.7	8.0	5.7	10.6	7.9	5.5	10.9
Germany	*17.6*	*4.3*	*35.3*	*19.4*	*5.0*	*37.9*	*21.7*	*6.1*	*40.8*	*24.0*	*7.8*	*43.8*
Italy	*6.8*	*3.1*	*13.4*	*8.4*	*3.7*	*16.5*	*8.5*	*3.2*	*17.3*	*12.8*	*4.6*	*25.6*
Poland	*10.6*	*8.3*	*13.6*	*10.5*	*8.2*	*13.4*	*10.5*	*8.2*	*13.2*	*10.8*	*8.0*	*14.3*
Slovenia	-		-	*6.5*	*5.3*	*7.8*	*6.2*	*5.2*	*7.5*	*9.0*	*7.2*	*11.1*

Source: Eurostat Online Database, May 2006.

In Slovenia, unlike the other countries involved in the survey, it is the *dual earner–dual carer* model that predominates, both partners contributing to the family income with their work while also cooperating in their child care tasks. In fact, in Slovenia part-time shows fewer gender differences than in Germany or Italy. In Slovenia, moreover, a policy to enhance child assistance services has been in force for some time, and, in general, a pattern of equal shares in the couple's care responsibilities predominates over the traditional model (Jozwiak, Kotowska et al. 2007). In fact, in the countries of Eastern Europe it is quite normal to see fathers taking a greater share in the family tasks right from the first years of the baby's life. In the other countries, on the other hand, the prevalent model is a modernised version of the *male breadwinner*[4] associated with the *double-burden* for women when the children arrive. This is why in Germany and Italy, even though to a minor extent, women with children, especially under the age of five, tend to "choose" part-time as a way of reconciling work and care tasks**. W**hile part-time in the western countries appears to be *induced* by the lack of child assistance services and measures to reconcile work and family life, in the eastern countries it seems to have more to do with real choices on the part of those requesting it.

Furthermore, when we go on to consider the temporary or atypical contracts, in three of the four JIFT project countries, the exception being Germany, we see percentages of employees on temporary contracts decidedly higher than (Poland and Slovenia) or at any rate very close to (the case of Italy) those working part-time (tab. 4).

While on the one hand these data are consistent with the European Employment Strategy (EES), which takes temporary contracts to be means to facilitate access to the labour market, on the other hand the progressive increase in these forms of contracts could lead to growing insecurity in the working conditions of many young people. Moreover, temporary contracts are more characteristic of the working conditions of women in Italy and Slovenia, while in Poland, given the particular economic trend, resort to such contracts seems to involve men and women equally. This is a point that suggests it might well be the precarious, insecure aspect of jobs, in Slovenia as in Italy, that dissuades the generations of young people/adults from the fertility option.

Tab. 4 – The incidence of workers on fixed-term contracts, 1997-2005 (% of subordinate employment, aged 15-64)

	1997			2000			2003			2005		
	MF	*M*	*F*	*MF*	*M*	*F*	*MF*	*M*	*F*	*MF*	*M*	*F*
EU-25	11.7	11.1	12.4	12.6	12.0	13.4	13.0	12.4	13.8	14.4	14.2	14.6
EU-15	12.4	11.7	13.4	13.7	12.8	14.7	13.1	12.2	14.1	14.2	14.0	14.6
New member countries	5.4	6.1	4.6	6.5	6.9	6.2	13.0	13.6	12.3	15.7	16.2	15.1
Germany	*11.8*	*11.6*	*12.1*	*12.7*	*12.5*	*13.1*	*12.2*	*12.1*	*12.3*	*14.2*	*14.4*	*14.0*
Italy	*7.9*	*6.9*	*9.4*	*10.1*	*8.7*	*12.2*	*9.9*	*8.2*	*12.2*	*12.3*	*10.5*	*14.7*
Poland	*4.8*	*5.6*	*4.0*	*5.8*	*6.5*	*4.9*	*19.4*	*20.8*	*17.8*	*25.7*	*26.5*	*24.7*
Slovenia	*-*	*-*	*-*	*13.7*	*12.7*	*14.8*	*13.7*	*12.6*	*14.9*	*17.4*	*15.7*	*19.3*

Source: Eurostat Online Database, May 2006.

[4] In this model the woman, too, contributes to the family income with her work, but her job commitment plays a secondary role in the family economy.

On examining more closely the reasons why employees accept non-standard forms of contracts (fixed-term and part-time), we note some interesting differences. In Germany and in Italy the parentage of employees accepting such contracts because they have not succeeded in finding full-time jobs is higher than the European average (EU-15 and EU-25) and involves almost exclusively female employment; in Poland this percentage stands at just 1.1% (tab. 5). However, when we look a the percentages of fixed-term employees who have accepted such contracts because of the impossibility of finding a job on open-end contract, we see that Germany alone shows values below the European average (1.3% as compared with the 3.6% of the EU) and with no evident gender differences. However, while in Italy the female condition in the labour market is characterised by temporary jobs, the terms of the situation are the reverse in Poland and Slovenia (tab. 5).

Tab. 5 – Employed on non-standard contracts (part-time and/or fixed-term) by gender, 2005 (% total employed)

	Only part-time, chosen because: No chance of finding a full-time job			**Only fixed-term, chosen because:** No chance of finding an open-end job		
	MF	M	F	MF	M	F
EU-25	2.5	1.0	4.2	3.6	3.7	3.4
EU-15	2.8	1.1	4.7	3.0	3.0	2.9
New member countries	0.9	0.4	1.4	7.2	8.0	6.2
Germany	*3.8*	*1.6*	*6.5*	*1.3*	*1.4*	*1.1*
Italy	*3.7*	*1.5*	*6.7*	*6.2*	*5.7*	*6.9*
Poland	*1.1*	*0.5*	*1.7*	*11.1*	*12.5*	*9.5*
Slovenia	-	-	-	*7.2*	*7.3*	*7.0*

Source: European Commission (2006).

Tab. 6 – Rate of transition of workers employed in 2000 on by job position in 2001 (composition %)

2000	2001	EU-15	DE	IT
Fixed-term or short-period contracts	Work on open-end contracts	32	32	28
	Work on fixed-term or short period contracts	42	37	48
	Training	3	3	4
	Self-employed	2	2	3
	Unemployed	22	25	17

Source: European Commission (2006).

Looking at the processes of transition from jobs on non-standard contracts to other forms of participation in the labour market, it will be seen that in Germany transition to steady forms of employment is decidedly smoother than in Italy, where there would appear to be an element of structural permanence in the condition of the temporary worker (tab. 6). It is, however, equally true that in Italy having a contract, even though lacking permanence, seems to guarantee a permanent place in the labour market, exit from it being less simple than in Germany. However, this finding does not obviate the need to introduce policies in support of transition from non-standard to secure forms of employment.

It remains to be seen whether, and if so how and to what extent, these various labour market patterns affect the reproductive and family decisions of young people/adults. Clearly, the economic aspect is not the only one in play. Policies in support of childcare

work, effective availability of quality services to reconcile work and family for women, the implementation of regulations for flexible management of working timetables to be adjusted according to family necessities – these are all factors that contribute to determine the conditions within which the couple – and let us stress, the couple – choose whether or not to have children.

3. The research

The JIFT project was promoted by the Fondazione G. Brodolini and the Department of Demographic Sciences of the Rome University "Sapienza" on the subject of "Job instability and changes in family trends: how to cope with these challenges through occupational and social policies actions based on a renewed Lisbon strategy?" The project saw the collaboration of an international partnership consisting of the Department of Demographic Sciences of the Rome University "Sapienza" for Italy, the Max Planck Institute for Demographic Research of Rostock for Germany, the Warsaw School of Economics for Poland and the Science and Research Centre of Koper of the University of Primorska for Slovenia. The project was developed over a span of 12 months, from December 2005 to November 2006. During this period four surveys were carried out in four urban environments (Rome, Hamburg, Warsaw and Ljubljana); three transnational meetings were organised to share in the choices regarding each phase in development of the project; four round tables were held (one per country) on the preliminary findings of the surveys to enhance the research with deeper study of the topics under consideration, and to open up discussion to the interests expressed by various protagonists of civil society (trade unions, associations, firms, etc.); and a final international conference was held at the comparative level for presentation and dissemination of the major findings.

The central activity of the JIFT project consisted in planning and carrying out a comparative multi-centre survey in four sample cities (Rome, Ljubljana, Hamburg and Warsaw) representing the situations in the countries participating in the project. The main aim of the research was to explore the relations between job characteristics, namely job insecurity, and the family choices of the young people/adults living in these four urban environments, as well as the social-cultural and economic determinants contributing to the definition of the reproductive choices of the single persons and couples..

To collect the data a structured questionnaire was drawn up divided into seven sections for general data, the leaving home, the entry into union, fertility choices and intentions, employment, and, finally, the use made of time and work/family reconciliation strategies. Data were collected through the CATI system (Computer assisted telephone interview).

To help with the comparative interpretation of the research findings each partner produced a summary of the main policy measures in force as of 2006 in the respective countries. These policy outlines take account of: labour market policies, gender and equal-opportunity policies, work/family reconciliation policies, and family policies.

Finally, certain aspects were agreed upon for in-depth examination with each partner-country in the research producing a comparative approach in order to identify those similarities and differences that could prompt common discussion. Moreover, each in-depth study includes not only analysis of the specific aspect agreed upon but

also some brief notes on policy lines. The aspects chosen concern leaving home for living alone or entering a union; the determinants of reproductive behaviour and of fertility intentions from both gender and couple viewpoint; the connections between labour market flexibility and family choices; and the problems of work/family reconciliation. All the contributions found a place in the final research project report.

4. Rome, Ljubljana, Hamburg and Warsaw: some comparative results

The relationship between what is known as the *flexible generation* of job contracts and family choices in the four urban contexts was analysed following two guidelines:

1) identification of the determinants of insecure jobs[5] (objective dimension) and part-time and of the perception of the condition of insecurity (subjective dimension), seeking to arrive at a closer definition of the concept of job "insecurity";
2) definition of the determinants of reproductive choices and fertility intentions of the interviewees, taking into account both the gender differences and the couple dynamics.

In the light of the specificity of each survey environment, in discussing the findings the aim will be to highlight:

a) the continuous difficulty of the labour market in capitalising the high-profile human resources available among the younger workforce;
b) the excessive distance between training systems and the labour market;
c) the persisting condition of instability in work history of the definition of the concept of *insecurity*;
d) the priority of economic and income stability as necessary precondition for transition to the first child;
e) the importance of considering jointly the level of the partners' education to evaluate the effective influence of education in fertility intentions.

4.1. Non-standard contracts, part-time and family choices

In this paragraph we focus on the determinants of the probability of being in a non-standard employment condition, having the perception of being a precarious worker, and working part-time.

Analysis of the survey data has shown some interesting similarities in the factors at work in the various urban environments on the probability of working on unsteady job contracts. In table 7 we report the effect of different explanatory variables on the probability of being employed on insecure contracts. The coefficients should be interpreted as an increase in the probability of having a non-standard contract corresponding to a specific individual characteristic (e.g. woman) versus the reference category (e.g. man), while holding the other variables constant in the model[6]. First, we can notice that there is not a significant difference between men and women in holding

[5] Insecure work is taken to include all fixed-term subordinate work contracts, full-time and part-time (fixed-term, temporary, apprenticeships, etc.) as well as the atypical or "non-standard" contracts (continuous coordinated collaboration, scholarships, research and doctorate grants, etc.).

[6] In the regressions we cannot arue that there is a causal relationship because many of the independent variables are potentially endogenous. Since we do not have convincing instrumental variables, the coefficienst should be interpreted as partial correlations.

a non-standard contract. Only in Warsaw women are more likely to be employed on insecure contracts than men. In Rome, Hamburg and Ljubljana age shows a significant negative relationship in both the younger and older cohorts with the probability of working on insecure contracts, confirming the fact that recourse to non-standard contracts is made with an end in view, to facilitate access to the job market. However, the data on the incidence of flexible contracts in Rome, proving very high for all the age classes including the most advanced, where most of the family choices should already have been made, seem to point to greater labour market criticality in Rome than in Hamburg or Ljubljana.

Tab. 7 – Estimate of the probability of being employed on insecure contracts

	dF/dx°			
	Hamburg	**Rome**	**Warsaw**	**Ljubljana**
Women	-0.003	-0.010	0.090**	0.123
30-34	-0.059*	-0.132***	-0.041	-0.070***
35-39	-0.064**	-0.091**	-0.047	-0.093***
40-44	-0.091**	-0.167***	-0.055	-0.144***
Average educational level	0.029	0.001	-0.085	0.991***
High educational level	0.099***	0.115**	-0.266***	0.829***
Difficulty in saving	0,044**	0.047*	0.043**	0.030**
Risk propensity	0,005	-0.024	-0.008	0.004
Insecure job history	0,037***	0,136***	0.150***	0.048***
Family social-economic status	-0,012	-0,050	-0.102**	-0.014
Presence of children	0,008	-0.075*	-0.081*	-0.063*

* weighted estimates

** dF/dx is the marginal effect of the variations in the control variables; for the dichotomous variables it is the marginal effect of discrete variation from 0 to 1.*

Source: processing by Naticchioni and Muzi on JIFT research data.

Table 7 reveals another, no less alarming result regarding the direct relationship observed in three cities out of four (Rome, Hamburg and Warsaw) between educational level and job insecurity – a relationship departing from what is empirically observed in other countries – European (like Slovenia itself) and non-European (like Canada and the United States) – where the probability of working in conditions of insecurity increases for persons of low educational levels (Naticchioni and Muzi, 2007). It would appear that for the young training and high qualifications do not lead to the right place in the labour market, mortifying their expectations and projects. This evidences an odd schizophrenia in the system, considering that the most recent EES guidelines include support and promotion for investment in human capital. Thus, in the face of policy lines favouring processes of increasingly high-profile and value-added professional qualification is a system incapable of giving such resources lasting inclusion, capitalising the available potential and offering steady job opportunities. The datum appears all the weightier when we consider the fact that another important objective of the renewed Lisbon Strategy is a matter of stepping up investments in technology, development and research

– investments that should favour extending the market segments open to the highly qualified workforce. And yet this workforce remains under-exploited, with continued large-scale drainage to countries able to make use of its creative and productive potential. The persisting job insecurity observed among the younger and more highly educated population of the sample in this research suggests that greater energy be put into promoting policies favouring matching between workforce and firms, by creating a network system providing the possibility to young people completing graduate or post-graduate courses to acquire experience in specific market segments. University system and the business world should create closer communication channels, so as to offer concrete opportunities to the better-qualified young people. For the time being, however, university system and the market remain two worlds apart, with no contact.

However, this is not all. Looking back over the working history of the sample interviewees for the last three years, we see in all four urban environments involved a further and indeed perverse effect of work insecurity; histories of work insecurity are more likely to involve the absence of steady job contracts (see tab. 7). This suggests that there is a vicious circle of precariousness: those who had more non-standard contracts in the past are more likely to be employed on insecure contracts at the time of the interview. Furthermore, since there is a negative correlation between non-standard employment and having children, the vicious circle of precariousness influences negatively also the decision of having children. Thus policies should act before the process has fully set in; the need is for early intervention, bringing in measures to favour and stimulate investment by firms in human resources acquired through the flexible generation of labour contracts.

Moreover, reduced saving capacity is a good indicator of job insecurity. In fact, in all four urban environments a significant positive correlation was observed between difficulty in saving and job insecurity. Precarious working conditions often mean discontinuity in income, to cope with which savings are drawn upon to fill the gaps when contracts do not apply. Thus the idea of saving as a means to achieve medium-long-term projects gives way to a function as social shock absorber. This means that the horizons of the younger generations close in as far as planning is concerned, favouring the logic of "living from hand to mouth".

Finally, regarding family characteristics, in Rome, Warsaw and Ljubljana people who have children are more likely to have steady jobs on open-end contracts. Thus the choice to have children appears closely bound up with job security and a guaranteed income for the interviewees.

Let us now look at the other side of the coin – the subjective perception of insecurity. In Rome, unlike the findings for Warsaw and Ljubljana, being a woman is more likely to mean feeling insecure (see tab. 8), probably because women are more often employed on non-standard and fixed-term contracts than men. Indeed, in Rome the lack of a steady job contract and experience increases the probability of feeling insecure. Along with all this there is, of course, also a reduced saving capacity. The probability of perceiving insecurity is associated mainly with the stories of persons with no children, coming from families having a relatively high social-economic status. This last point may seem inconsistent with the other aspects of the problem, but it can be accounted for with the difficulty that many young people-adults experience today in reaching the status of the families they come from. If it is even truer now than in the

past that people bear the burden of their origins on their backs, there can be no taking for granted that any of the possible advantages will be retained. Whatever the human and economic capital at the outset, the insecurity of the present is on the increase. This does not apply to Warsaw, where, the lower the original social-economic status, the more likely will be the sense of insecurity. However, in Warsaw, too, the sense of insecurity is negatively correlated with the presence of children, and positively with unsteady job contracts. And the sense of insecurity seems to increase with the relatively older age classes (40-44). In Ljubljana, the only significant factor that appears to be associated with the perception of insecurity is lack of steady employment, somewhat consistently with the observations on the high percentages of workers on temporary contracts.

Tab. 8 –Factors correlated with insecurity (subjective perception)

	dF/dx		
	Rome	**Warsaw**	**Ljubljana**
Women	0.168***	0.149	-0,017
30-34	-0.058	-0.019	-0,038
35-39	-0.069	0.029	0,071
40-44	-0.171	0.074**	0,022
Average educational level	0,000	0,004	0.085
High educational level	0,016	-0,042	0.047
Difficulty in saving	0,102***	0.008	0.024
Risk propensity	-0,024	-0.012	-0.001
Insecure job history	0,066***	0,001	0.016
Unstable job contract	0,480***	0,127***	0.264***
Family social-economic status	0,077**	-0,056***	-0.036
Presence of children	-0,140***	-0.052***	-0.005

** dF/dx is the marginal effect of changes in control variables; for dummy variable dF/dx is the marginal effect of a discrete change from 0 to 1.*

Source: Processing by Naticchioni and Muzi on JIFT research data.

What is then the role of part-time employment? We would like to investigate the similarities and differences across the four urban contexts in the use of part-time as a means of work-family reconciliation. Moreover, we are concerned with the diffusion of part-time contracts among the young in order to facilitate their entry in the labour market or to reconcile work and study.

We run a probit regression model for each of the four cities in order to verify whether and how part-time choices (versus full-time employment) are related to individual or household characteristics as well as labour market characteristics. For this purpose we include in the model variables such as age and sex of the employee, the educational level, the employment sector, the presence of children, whether he/she lives with the partner, the economic- status, the perception of the ability to reconcile work and family.

The results show two different trends under way in the four cities. On the one hand, in Hamburg and Ljubljana the probability to work part-time is highly correlated with the chosen explicative variables. The situation appears more complex in Warsaw and Ljubljana. In Hamburg and Rome the results confirm the hypothesis that part-time is used to reconcile work and family. In both cases the coefficients regarding the family situation and the sex of the employee are relevant and statistically significant. On average and *coeteris paribus*, having children increases the probability of working part-time by 14% in Hamburg and Rome. For women the probability of working part-time is 30% higher in Hamburg and 23% in Rome. In these two cities the positive and significant relationship between working part-time and the need of coping with family duties seems to be confirmed also by the variable related to the difficulty of saving, considered as proxy for the employee socio-economic status. In both cities a lower income is associated to a higher probability of working part-time. This suggests that, while there is a lack of public measures sustaining the families, the part-time solution represents a valid alternative to the use of private means of reconciliation, such as private nurseries or private child-minders.

Also in Warsaw women are more likely to work part-time. However, the relationship between the presence of children and working part-time is less clear. The association is, in fact, negative which suggests that the presence of children, and thus of a higher need of additional income, negatively influences the choice of this working arrangement.

Eventually, Ljubljana shows a peculiar situation: none of the variables linked to the family situation is significantly associated with part-time employment. Conversely, age and education play a significant role. The probability of working part-time reduces with age and is higher for people with medium education. This would suggest that this working arrangement is used to reconcile work and study.

A significantly negative effect of age is noticed also in Rome, while education does not show the same impact. In Rome the probability of working part-time decreases with age. Part-time solutions should be considered both as a means of reconciliation and as facilitating the entry into the labour market.

Tab. 9– Estimates of the probability of working part-time (marginal effects)

	dF/dx$^{\diamond}$							
	Hamburg		**Rome**		**Warsaw**		**Ljubljana**	
Women	0.300	***	0.226	***	0.060	**	0.005	
Age 30-34	-0.069	*	-0.120	***	-0.017		-0.019	*
Age 35-39	-0.036		-0.089	**	-0.031		-0.019	*
Age 40-44	0.010		-0.143	***	0.026		-0.032	**
Medium educational level	0.179	***	-0.071	*	-0.101		0.838	***
High educational level	0.115	**	-0.108	**	-0.232		0.392	***
Private sector	0.029		0.147	***	0.029		-0.024	**
Living with the	0.013		-0.025		0.048	**	-0.011	

partner							
Difficulties in saving	0.127	***	0.058	***	0.024		0.000
Ability to reconcile work and family	0.034		0.043		0.044	*	0.010
Presence of children	0.136	***	0.141	**	-0.054	*	-0.007

Notes: Weighted estimates. *,**,*** indicate the significance level at 10%, 5% and 1%.
◊ dF/dx is the marginal effect of the variation of the control variables. For dichotomic variables it is the marginal effect of the discrete variation form 0 to 1.
Source: Elaborations by Muzi and Naticchioni on JIFT data.

4.2. Fertility,reproductive intentions and employment

Proceeding with discussion of the second point concerning the definition of the determinants of fertility choices (of the first child) in the case of the young people-adults interviewed, it is worth recalling that in the four urban environments a common and generalised trend to reduced, delayed childbearing is confirmed. Of course, the various environments involved in the research also have their own specific features.

Survival analysis carried out on the four five-year cohorts of persons born as from 1961 in the four cities has revealed, as one goes from the oldest to the youngest of the cohorts, progressive lag in the age of men and women with the first child (see tab. 10). In the oldest cohorts (1961-1965) the women of Ljubljana and Warsaw show lower median ages for the first child than the women of Rome and Hamburg (respectively 27.1 and 25.8 as against 32.8 and 30.0). Of the women belonging to the 1971-1975 cohorts, only 8% in Rome, about 15% in Ljubljana and Hamburg, and 27% in Warsaw have the first child by the age of 25. Over and above the criticality observed in the Roman context, delay in transition to the first child seems to apply to all four cities in the sample, while the gaps and differences going from the oldest to the youngest cohorts tend to draw closer. The first child experience usually comes for women earlier than for men for the obvious reasons of the couples' age differences (the women generally younger than their partners), and the need to avoid the risks of pregnancy which increase with age and lead the women to limit the maternity choice within a certain period of time.

Tab. 10 – First child. Kaplan-Meier survival function estimates for four cohorts of men and women

1961-65 Cohort								
	First quartile		Median		S(25)		S(35)	
	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M
Hamburg	25.2	28.1	30.0	41.0	0.75	0.89	0.33	0.57
Ljubljana	23.2	25.5	27.1	30.5	0.64	0.81	0.27	0.31
Rome	27.2	29.4	32.8	33.2	0.87	0.96	0.39	0.47
Warsaw	22.4	26.3	25.8	32.3	0.54	0.83	0.13	0.42
1966-70 Cohort								
	First quartile		Median		S(25)		S(35)	
	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M
Hamburg	26.9	32.8	33.5	-	0.80	0.92	0.45	0.65
Ljubljana	23.0	28.3	28.3	31.8	0.67	0.89	0.25	0.41
Rome	28.8	30.8	33.9	38.0	0.89	0.96	0.44	0.64
Warsaw	23.7	25.8	27.5	29.3	0.67	0.82	0.23	0.31
1971-75 Cohort								

	First quartile		Median		S(25)		S(35)	
	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M
Hamburg	27.7	32.8	32.2	-	0.85	0.94	0.38	0.71
Ljubljana	28.1	29.5	34.5	-	0.87	0.93	0.50	0.51
Rome	30.5	-	-	-	0.92	0.98	0.51	0.79
Warsaw	24.6	27.0	30.3	31.3	0.73	0.87	0.30	0.31
1976-81 Cohort								
	First quartile		Median		S(25)		S(35)	
	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M
Hamburg	28.5	-	-	-	0.85	0.91	-	-
Ljubljana	29.5	-	-	-	0.94	0.98	-	-
Rome	-	-	-	-	0.94	0.97	-	-
Warsaw	27.1	-	-	-	0.87	0.93	-	-

Source: Elaboration by Deriu and Mamolo on JIFT research data.

The lag in transition to the first child is also confirmed with respect to the male component of the population, whose median age at birth of the first child comes well above 30 in all four cities in the sample and in all the cohorts. Comparison between the oldest cohorts (1961-1965) and the youngest (1976-1981) shows that 17% of the men in Warsaw have already become fathers former by the age of 25 against the minimum of 4% observed in Rome. In the latter cohort the percentage falls below 10% in all the four cities.

In order to highlight the possible associations between childbearing and employment, we consider the working conditions of both parents at the time of of the first pregnancy (see tab. 11) and take into account only coples for which this information is available.

Economic stability, and in particular job stability for at least one of the two partners, is seen to play a central role in the couple's decision to have the first child, constituting the necessary and indeed indispensable precondition to determine the fertility choice.

Table 11 shows that the combination with both partners employed on steady jobs corresponds in all four cities with the highest percentage of interviewees (couples) who have chosen to have their first child. The percentage is significantly higher in Warsaw and Ljubljana (65.4% and 73.6% respectively), probably because female participation in the labour market has always been far higher in the countries of the former communist bloc than elsewhere. While on the one hand job security constitutes an important precondition to take fertility choices, it is on the other hand also true that job stability has been secured ever later in the working history of the younger generations, ever more often preceded by a long series of training activities delaying entry in the labour market.

In the cases where only one of the partners has a steady job when pregnancy arrives, it is usually the male. In Rome this is true for 24% of the couples, a percentage that decreases to 18% in Hamburg, and to 17% and 14% in Warsaw and Ljubljana. In Hamburg the percentage of couples where none of the partners has a stable employment is not negligible. Moreover, in the light of certain further studies based on analysis by cohorts, in Rome and Hamburg an appreciable increase was observed in the percentage of combinations in which at least one of the two components of the couple lacks job stability at the level of the youngest cohorts. This would appear to bear out the initial hypothesis of the research, that reduction and postponement of fertility choices among

the younger generations go hand in hand with delayed and prevalently insecure employment.

Tab. 11 – Employment status[7] of the couple at time of first pregnancy

ROME			
	Man employed with a permanent contract	Man other employment (self-employed, non-standard, does not work)	Total
Woman employed with a permanent contract	53,6	8,7	62,3
Woman other employment (self-employed, non-standard, does not work)	24,3	13,4	37,7
Total	78,0	22,0	100,0
WARSAW			
	Man employed with a permanent contract	Man other employment (self-employed, non-standard, does not work)	Total
Woman employed with a permanent contract	65,4	9,3	74,8
Woman other employment (self-employed, non-standard, does not work)	16,6	8,7	25,2
Total	82,0	18,0	100,0
LJUBLJANA			
	Man employed with a permanent contract	Man other employment (self-employed, non-standard, does not work)	Total
Woman employed with a permanent contract	73,6	6,3	79,9
Woman other employment (self-employed, non-standard, does not work)	13,5	6,5	20,1
Total	87,1	12,9	100,0
HAMBURG			
	Man employed with a permanent contract	Man other employment (self-employed, non-standard, does not	Total

[7] At this point we must clarify some working definitions used in constructing the categories employed and unemployed: the former includes all the interviewees with open-end work contracts and the self-employed workers, while the latter extends not only to the unemployed according to the standard definition used at the European level (Workforce survey), but also to interviewees on fixed-term or non-standard contracts (insecure workers).

		work)	
Woman employed with a permanent contract	51,2	11,2	62,5
Woman other employment (self-employed, non-standard, does not work)	18,2	19,3	37,5
Total	69,5	30,5	100,0

Source: Elaboration by Deriu and Mamolo of JIFT research data.

In order to put into evidence similarities and differences in the transition to the first child between the four urban contexts and evaluate whether younger cohorts behaviour is converging we use a parametric event history model (piecewise constant exponential model). The final model, separate for men and women, includes covariates related to the urban context, the cohort and their interaction, besides some other variables considered as important determinants of the transition to first birth. The number of siblings and the educational level of the interviewee at the time of the interview-proxy for population compositional differences- are included in the model as time constant covariates. The entry into union and the first job, two relevant determinants of the transition to the first child but which might act differently in the four cities, have been included as time varying covariates.

The model (tab. 12) shows the differences in the transition to the first child between the four cities for the various cohorts. Women register significant differences (fig. 2). In Hamburg the younger cohorts seem to converge to those living in Rome, while in Warsaw and Ljubljana there seems not to be a convergence process under way. These two cities still show a higher propensity for the first child. For men a divergent process is observed between Ljubljana and Warsaw, on the one hand, and Rome, on the other. A divergent pattern is noticed also for the younger cohorts in Hamburg who show a higher propensity for having the first child. Individual characteristics included in the model are all significant and act in the expected direction. A higher number of siblings, a covariate representing an indirect indicator of the interviewee's biographical narrative, positively influences the birth of the first child, similarly to the entry into union and having already had a first job. The educational level, working as proxy for the population composition, is both for men and women significantly and negatively correlated to the propensity of having the first child.

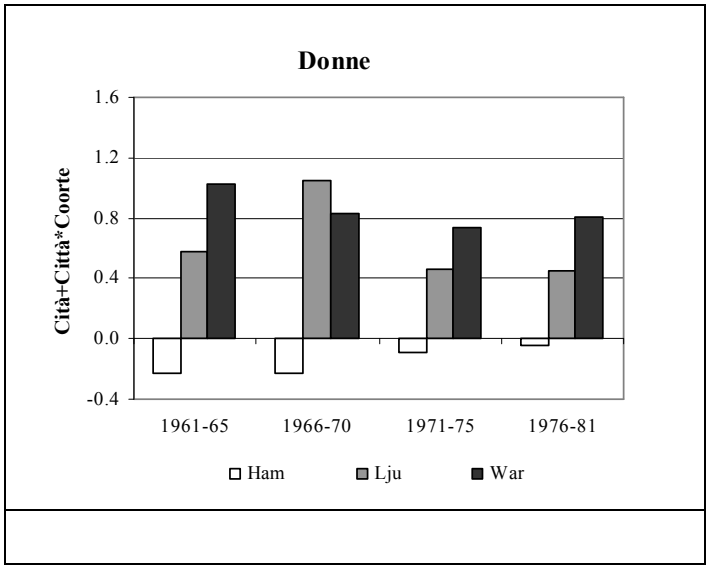
Tab. 12 – Coefficients of the piecewise constant exponential model on transition to the first child, women and men

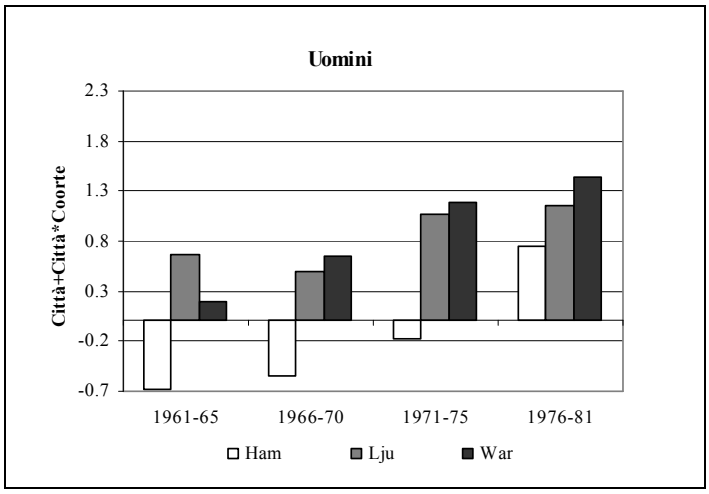
	F		*M*	
	Coeff.	Sig.	Coeff.	Sig.
Cohort (Ref. 1961-65)				
1966-70	-0.1675		-0.1777	
1971-75	-0.1309		-0.8997	***
1976-81	-0.6614	*	-1.4805	**
City (Ref. Rome)				
Ljubljana	0.5714	***	0.6707	***
Hamburg	-0.2241		-0.6776	***
Warsaw	1.0282	***	0.1934	
*City*Cohort (Ref. Rome 1961-65)*				

Ljub*1966-70	0.4738	*	-0.1787	
Ljub*1971-75	-0.1061		0.3925	
Ljub*1976-81	-0.1206		0.4884	
Hamb*1966-71	-0.0026		0.1345	
Hamb*1971-75	0.1388		0.4966	
Hamb*1976-81	0.1792		1.4228	**
War*1966-72	-0.2004		0.4539	**
War*1971-75	-0.2936		1.0026	***
War*1976-81	-0.2236		1.2419	**
# Brothers or sisters (Ref. <2 bro/sis)	0.1221	°	0.1102	
Educational level (Ref. low)				
Medium	-0.2508	*	-0.2082	°
High	-0.6597	***	-0.4064	***
In union (Ref. No)	2.4669	***	2.4514	***
First job (Ref. No)	0.1763	*	0.4012	***
Log-likelihood	-6707.50	***	-5415.02	***

Significant at level: *** p<0.001; **p<0.01; * p<0.05; ° p<0.10
Source: Elaborations by Deriu and Mamolo on JIFT research data.

Fig. 2 – Differences in the transition to the first child between the four urban context (rif. Rome) by cohort. Women and men





Source: Elaboration by Deriu and Mamolo on JIFT data.

The analysis of realized fertility has been accompanied by the study of fertility intentions in the four urban context. We adopted a couple perspective and focus on the role of employment status on reproductive strategies. Here we report only the results of the model in which we consider only the childless interviewees who live in couple and are employed.

The logistic regression model (tab. 13) on the intention of having a child within the next three years shows for women a positive link between a stable employment status and the intention of having the first child. Similarly, there is a negative effect on the intentions of the perception of being precarious. Women express the need of feeling secure in their employment, independently of the partner's situation, in order to face maternity. Policies should thus support women's fertility intentions, facilitating employment and consequently economic stability.

Particularly interesting is also the interpretation of the link between education and fertility intentions, while considering the dynamics internally to the couple which influence fertility choices. From the models it seems that there is a conflict between the traditional *male breadwinner model* and the *double earner* or *gender equal*. When the male partner has a higher education, his intentions are stronger than in the case both partners are poorly educated. Even though not statistically significant, it is worth noting that when the woman has a higher education, her intentions decrease. For both men and women the probability is higher if both are highly educated. It seems that *gender equality* indicators are an important predictor of the woman's fertility intensions, in particular when both of the partners are highly educated.

Analysis of fertility intentions taking the couple for reference suggests there may be two decision-making maps directing the fertility choices of men and women along different paths. For men it is the stability of their union; for the women, stability of working conditions in terms of economic independence. Men look to formalisation of their union; they seek the solidity of the marriage bond upon which to found their first child project. Women, however, follow a different logic, seeking a steady job before choosing to have a child. The woman means to fulfil her aspirations (especially if she has a high educational level), gaining a position in the world of work and a place in society before becoming mother.

Tab. 13 – Logistic regression models on fertility intentions in the three years following on the interview; men and women nullipari/ and employed

	Employed childless males		*Employed childless females*	
	B	*Sig.*	*B*	*Sig.*
Residence (ref. Ljubljana)				
Hamburg	-1.708	***	-0.460	
Rome	2.032		1.144	*
Warsaw	1.708		-0.082	
Age of interviewee (ref. 25-34)				
35-44	-0.308		-1.549	***
Age of partner (ref. 25-34)				
35-44	-1.460	***	-1.047	**
Couple's level of education (ref. both lacking higher educational qualification)				
Only the male with higher con education	1.426	**	-0.482	
Only the female with higher education	-0.214		-0.294	
Both with higher education	0.101		0.308	
Status of couple (ref. living together)				
Married	1.340	***	0.445	
Accommodation (ref. rented or supplied free comodato d'uso)				
Owned	-0.567		-0.302	
Male's work contract (ref. other)				
Open-ended	0.065		-0.909	**
Female's work contract (ref. other)				
Open-ended	-0.185		0.922	*
Insecure (ref. No)				
Yes	0.083		-0.500	
Type of contract (ref. private or self-employed)				
Public	0.068		0.204	
Part-time contract (ref. No)				
Yes	0.640		-0.028	
At least one of the couple a student (ref. No)				
Yes	-1.078		-1.395	*
Flexible contract (ref. No)				
Yes	-0.489		-0.920	**
Constant	*0.159*		*1.519*	*

Legend: *** p<0.01; **p<0.05; *p<0.10
Source: Elaboration by Bernardi, Di Giulio and Vatterrott on JIFT research data.

Bringing together the various threads of the major issues so far addressed, we can conclude that the basic hypothesis behind the JIFT project, i.e. a strong and significant link between fertility choices and job security, finds ample support, albeit with all the necessary distinctions. There can be no doubt that it is not so much simple job insecurity that leads to decline and delay in fertility choices, as rather the persistence of the condition, to the point of becoming chronic. It is then that young people faced with an uncertain future accept (for it is not an active choice) to "live from hand to mouth", foregoing any more distant prospects, abandoning long-term projects to shape their lives (and family projects in the first place). Thus they continue living with their parents, putting off the stage of transition to adult life.

In order to favour transition from conditions of job insecurity to stable conditions it is necessary to create the circumstances for contact and constructive "contamination" between the places of education/training (including university) and the labour market, taking into account the aspirations and needs that drive men and women in different ways.

Scientific analysis based on empirical findings must go hand in hand with study of the policy measures that can provide answers to the needs and expectations of the younger generations.

5. Some policy indications

The evidence emerging from this study confirms the strategic challenge that the "new family models" pose for the European social model (Rodrigues, 2006). Much has already been written about this challenge, and it has been given a good deal of hard thinking, leading to the experimentation of innovative policies in a wide variety of environments. The findings of this research thus confirm – bringing new light to bear upon – not only the multidimensional nature of the factors affecting the fertility choices of young people/adults, but also the different ways they combine in the various different environments.

We may say, then, that the sustainability of the European social model is to be maintained through a series of reforms that need to be introduced in the fields of education and work, as in the social sphere, to address the new reproductive and family behaviours adopted by the new generations of young Europeans. Alongside these reforms we must not lose sight of the need for a parallel commitment to generating cultural change, such as to favour fairer shares in the tasks of child care and rearing between men and women.

What, then, are the policy indications that can be advanced in the light of the findings emerging from this project? Of course, there are no simple solutions to such a complex problem as low fertility rates, which has marked the history of many European countries for over forty years. In the course of time the phenomenon has seen a succession of approaches and highly differentiated policy strategies, with effective and expected results that have cohered in some cases and diverged in others. The policy lines emerging from in-depth study in this research take account of the thinking and experience accumulated in the past; they have no pretence of being particularly innovative, but address specific issues with a clear understanding of the need for integration: job and economic security (integrated with the right reconciliation policies), work flexibility, policies for integration between study courses and labour market, cultural action and intergenerational solidarity.

With regard to job security, transition from fixed-term and atypical contracts to open-end contracts must have priority in the employment agenda. The utility of atypical contracts can be recognised and affirmed as favouring access to the labour market for a young and highly qualified workforce, but with commitment on the part of the firms to capitalising such resources with a view to subsequent, definitive absorption. The atypical or non-standard contract should be seen as a means to start out on the professional path, avoiding degeneration into plain "insecurity". Thus, to preclude the possibility for firms to use this generation of flexible contracts as a way of limiting labour costs, a system of incentives and disincentives could be introduced to apply on

the basis of the amount of atypical labour used. The need would be, as Feldstein (1976) and Topel (1983) have suggested, to make firms pay the social costs deriving from job insecurity, now borne solely by the State, in proportion with the use they make of the atypical labour market. Intergenerational solidarity could also play a crucial role in recruiting a new workforce or stabilising the atypical workforce. It is a delicate issue, but one might also consider the possibility of "freezing" the career progressions of the stable workforce for a limited period of time so as to make savings in resources to be channelled into new work contracts and into the transformation of non-standard into open-end contracts.

In favouring the stabilisation process of working conditions for the new generations, particular attention should go to the female workforce. This study has shown just how much women need to feel independent to be sufficiently motivated to have a child – economically independent of the partner. Thus the need is for policies promoting stabilisation for the female workforce, offering guarantees that careers can be continued and preventing penalisation when work is interrupted for pregnancy or parental leave, enhancing policies for work/family reconciliation. To favour wider use of such measures by men, too, it would be necessary to bring in reconciliation measures applicable to men and women with no distinction, allowing the couple to negotiate how best to use it taking due account of the partners' joint needs. Parental leave should be long and flexible enough for men and women to be able to make the most of the paternity/maternity experience. Access to public child assistance services and the educational system (at least up to the end of primary school) should be on the basis of timetables compatible with the parents' job commitments, while post and banking services, and indeed the public administration in general, should be automated with modern technologies to streamline bureaucratic procedures and formalities. The employers should for their part contribute to the process of enhancing work/family reconciliation by introducing child assistance services within or in the vicinity of the workplace, as indeed the provision of company stores to help employees save on shopping and remove the some of the inconveniences they come up against to get in supplies. Intergenerational solidarity could also be favoured by setting up within the companies or public bodies time banks, fed with the participation of both active and retired staff.

Let us now come to the question of *job flexibility*. With specific reference to flexibility in timetables, women and men should equally be placed in a position to negotiate timetable management with the employer so as to reconcile family and job commitments.

Job flexibility can also be taken in terms of mobility. In this respect crucial importance again attaches to the *connection between university system and labour market* (in the broadest sense of the word). Graduate courses should be reviewed and reconstructed taking into account the need to create opportunities for contact between young people and the world of work, at least in the last year studies. The need is to devise binding forms of cooperation for the persons involved, subject to verification and evaluation. Various types of incentives could be provided to favour this kind of interaction between university system and the world of work. The university system could constitute the crossroads in a network of connections and relations with firms, companies, organisations and associations, local bodies, international organisations, etc., in order to create concrete opportunities for placement of the better-qualified young

people in the market. Of course, these networks should be governed by solid bilateral agreements, in which the organisations on the receiving end take on the responsibility of defining a path for the professionalisation of young people within the network. This means that mobility, at least at this initial point in the path, could be an integral part of the training experience for young people, although it must conclude with secure placement at some point in the network.

Last but not least, we come to *cultural change*, as precondition for policies in support of transition to the life of a couple and reproductive choices for the younger generations to be able to generate change at the demographic level: campaigns should be launched to enhance the children's social dimension, to support women in their careers and economic independence, to encourage intergenerational solidarity, and to adopt advanced models for the sharing and management of tasks and roles between men and women. It is only by starting from this slow but incisive cultural action that the EU will be able to cope with the challenged posed by the latest demographic trends.

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